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deep and affecting; emotions which he can only discover by the swelling sigh which heaves his breast; by the streaming, uplifted eye of gratitude, directed towards heaven.

Sensibility, then, should be cherished in our hearts. It is the offspring of reflection. Reflection is the evidence of our rationality, the formidable antagonist of vice, and the grand coadjutor of virtue. It releases us from the galling bondage of our passions, and prepares the heart for the reception of sensibility. Sensibility will sweeten our passage through this world; it will cause a perpetual sunshine on our souls; it will disarm and extirpate those direful passions, which dishonour the dignity of man; it will qualify us for the enjoyment of all pleasures which our beneficent Creator has distributed to this lower world; it will smooth the thorny path of life, and soften the rugged pillow of the bed of death. It is true, that being rendered more susceptible of pleasure, we will also be made more susceptible of pain; but this will ultimately prove for our advantage; the little trifling pains and disappointments which we must here encounter, will tend to convince us of the uncertainty of all sublunary enjoyments, and induce us to fix our eyes and affections stedfastly on that second life which is approaching, in which we shall be inconceivably, exquisitely, and eternally happy, in the enjoyment of pure and heavenly bliss.

MARCELLUS.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

IMPORTANT BENEFITS RESULTING
FROM BOOK SOCIETIES.

GENTLEMEN,

CONVINCED of the great benefit that would ultimately flow

from the spread of Book Societies, it was with sincere pleasure that I read an essay in your Magazine recommending their general formation. From my conviction of their great importance, I have been induced to trouble you with a few thoughts on the subject; and although their utility is so apparent, as scarcely to require a word in their support, yet as mankind require less to be shown what is right, than persuaded to adopt it, I was, from this consideration persuaded, that you would not think me trespassing unnecessarily on your pages, or your time.

It will be generally allowed that societies, as they become more enlightened, become proportionably more virtuous, for to say otherwise, to me would appear a libel on the moral government of the world. It would be saying that men, as they more clearly saw their duty, would be less likely to practise; that the plainer the path leading to their own good was, the more truant would be their steps.

To enumerate all the benefits that would naturally arise from extensive reading among the middling and lower classes of society, would be endless. Among the more prominent may be named the singular advantage of withdrawing youth from the seductive influence of intemperate company, destructive alike to body and mind; and instead of dissipating both in gross and criminal pursuits, substituting the calm enjoyments of domestic life, for the turbulent and debasing pleasures of drunkenness and debauchery. This is a more than trifling advantage, and to the lower classes of society in particular, a blessing of no common magnitude. It is adding to the stock of innocent amusements, and to increase the quantity of positive good, is a pur-

snit, which, while it delights the philanthropist, cannot but merit the approving smile of philosophy. But neither the withdrawing of youth from scenes of vice or folly, nor placing a rational amusement, alike calculated for every age and rank in society, within our reach, are the only permanent advantages of a general formation of reading societies. Among its other advantages may be named the diffusion of useful and ornamental knowledge; liberating the mind from the tyrannical sway of absurd prejudices, and the trammels of illiberal and exclusive attachments; and by expanding the mind, and strengthening our reasoning powers, enabling us to fill, with honour to ourselves, and advantage to the public, whatever station in society, providence in its wisdom may have assigned us.

With an enlightened populace, the patriot need not fear despotism, nor the loyalist, anarchy. No monarch will dare to infringe on the liberties of men clear-sighted enough to perceive their rights, and determined to bequeath them unimpaired to posterity. Nor will any factious demagogue attempt to seduce men from their allegiance, who know that a well ordered government is one of the greatest blessings of society.

But when we consider the numerous privations under which the lower classes of society have to labour, it seems folly to expect that their thirst of knowledge would lead them to expend in the purchase of books, that money more immediately necessary in procuring for themselves and families, the necessities and comforts of life. This great impediment to the general diffusion of literature, it is the peculiar advantage of book societies to remove. Institutions admirably calculated

from their capability of being adapted to every scale of expenditure, of opening the paths of knowledge, at a trifling expence, to the very lowest rank in civilized society. And when we consider the present high prices of books, and the expensive manner in which new works are generally published, it is of some importance even to men in easy circumstances, who are fond of general reading, to procure by means of subscription libraries, suited to their rank in life, a gratification not otherwise to be had, without making considerable pecuniary sacrifices.

In solitary reading the mind is apt to wander amidst a bewildering maze of unsettled opinions, as hastily adopted as they are wantonly forsaken; or else, to settle with the complacency of error, in a few favourite opinions which their researches may confirm, but cannot shake. The timid are liable to the one extreme; the self-willed and obstinate, to the other. Amidst the variety of conflicting speculations to be met with in books, the one wanders in pursuit of uniformity, without that decision of character necessary to form any opinion for himself; with the same incohesion as liquids that receive every impression, without retaining any. The obstinate having once formed his opinions, spurns with indignation at every attempt to expose their falsity; and which like engravings upon iron, cannot be erased without partially destroying the material on which they are impressed. In communities however, where the members are in the habit of reading the same books, and communicating their sentiments without reserve to each other, discussions will naturally arise favourable to the conviction of prejudice, and the detection of error. False opinions will be

displayed in all their native absurdity; and the insinuations of ignorance yield to the dictates of truth. Some will be found who do not breathe the same atmosphere of prejudice as their friends, and from advantage of situation can take a more extended view of the mental horizon, unimpeded by the obstructions that bar the prospect on the perceptive powers of their less fortunate associates. From having such men partners in our reading, and associates in the same literary pursuits, much may be expected. Opinions that do not stand the test of a critical examination will be exploded, and sentiments established, and discrepancies reconciled that would otherwise overwhelm the weak and the unsteady.

Nor would the trouble be great in persuading people of the utility and practicability of such institutions. The public mind seldom requires more than an impulse, and a public spirited individual, with a few associates, will at all times be able to establish libraries on a scale fitted to the district of country in which they reside. I would particularly recommend to individuals, members of such societies, or residing in the neighbourhood of places where they are established, to transmit for insertion in your Magazine, detailed plans of those libraries, with a general account of the description of books of which they are formed. This would stimulate other places to follow their example, and by affording a variety of plans, would enable the founders of all new societies to frame theirs, on the model of that one most consonant to the peculiar circumstances of their own particular case. To frame any general laws as best suited for conducting book societies would be a presumptuous undertaking, when we consider that the nature of the plan

on which they are conducted, and the character of their books must vary with the circumstances and tastes of the individuals composing them. Popular opinion will at times give currency to one set of opinions to the prejudice of others; and peculiar studies prevail in particular districts. In such cases those to whom the choice of books is trusted, must be contented with following the popular feeling, and adapting their books to whatever study may be the rage. Perhaps indeed, it would be best to do so, when we estimate the ardour with which people engage in any fashionable literary pursuit, not so much from its intrinsic excellence, as from a desire to imitate and excel their contemporaries. At such times particular topics will be studied with a degree of zeal favourable to their complete elucidation; and displaying powers of mind that would have lain dormant, were it not for the adventitious importance conferred on these pursuits by popular opinion. But although we cannot decidedly settle on any particular plan by which these institutions should be conducted, or name any books as exclusively proper to enter into their composition, yet perhaps the last subject will admit of some remarks.

In any library of this kind that I have seen, or in any catalogue of such that I have examined, I have observed that they were generally composed of works in the belles lettres, to the exclusion of every book treating even remotely of science. In a few indeed, Encyclopedias were to be found, but the exception in their favour arose not so much from the scientific as the miscellaneous matter they contained.

The propriety of this appears extremely questionable. While we decorate the human mind, we should

not neglect to add those massy columns, which while they strengthen the whole fabric, can alone by their solidity, perpetuate the delicacies and graces of ornamental literature.

For two reasons science should be more generally cultivated than it appears to be; from its intimate connection with every business of life, and from the highly beneficial effects it is capable of producing in the human mind.

To enter into particulars with regard to the first will be unnecessary to those who know that to discoveries in the sciences we are indebted for some of the latest and most splendid improvements in the arts. As instances of this in chemistry alone, it will be sufficient to notice the immense advantages derived to the practice of bleaching from the discoveries of Berthollet; and the great pecuniary saving likely to result from the substitution of gas in lighting the streets of large towns and extensive manufactories. In fact, by a skilful and more general application of scientific knowledge, we may arrive at a degree of superior and unexpected excellence in every department of human exertions, from the simplest operations of husbandry to the most complex and boasted production of art.

Nor would science by being more generally applied to useful and common pursuits, have its lustre impaired, or its progress retarded. The consequence would be the collection of an immense store of untouched materials for the scientific artisan. And a philosophical spirit pervading all ranks would amply repay the trouble of its diffusion, and its nominal degradation, by a profusion of original observations and authenticated facts, poured into the capacious reservoirs of science.

Theory and practice by their union would mutually assist each other. And philosophy would not then be confined to the circumscribed, and often barren precincts of the college, but have the extensive field of human affairs to perambulate; and descending from its lofty and ideal speculations, mingle with increased effect in the common affairs of life. From the extended circle of exertions, and the increased number of scientific cultivators, we might naturally expect a luxuriant harvest of splendid discoveries and useful inventions.

Any one who has mingled much in the world, must have been frequently astonished at the extreme deficiency of reasoning powers displayed by the generality of people, when any subject requiring more than common discussion has become matter of debate. Some are not prepared to go farther than a mere negative or approval; whilst others, when attempting to explain the grounds on which their opinions are formed, will reason with equal confidence on a slight analogy, and an established fact. But what is chiefly observable, is the extreme perversity with which they wander from the subject, and introduce what is totally irrelevant; whilst that which is of importance is never brought to bear on the question at issue.

I am inclined to believe that this laxity of reasoning among well-informed people, may in a considerable degree be imputed to their desultory mode of reading; and to the miscellaneous nature of the books that they peruse. Such works are calculated less for regulating our judgments than quickening our perceptions; and whilst they inflame the imagination, do not proportionably strengthen the power that should restrain and direct it. In

books on polite literature, systematic arrangement is generally neglected, and conclusions are drawn probably with sufficient accuracy, but without the previous steps in the argument being made sufficiently obvious to the reader. This cannot indeed be considered as very censurable in such works where a formal plan and rigorous demonstration, would by giving the work an air of didactic stiffness, destroy in a great measure their character of elegant compositions. But in perusing books of this description, the reader not accustomed to accurate reasoning, will frequently miss the drift of the author's arguments, from their direction not being clearly pointed out ; and will insensibly contract a certain obscurity of thought and inaccuracy of expression.

By studying any of the severer sciences however, with attention, this custom will be prevented ; and even where it has become habitual, may in a great measure be removed. In the mathematics nothing is granted but what is self-evident : the proposition whose truth is to be established, is enunciated in the most perspicuous manner ; the connection subsisting between the various parts of the demonstration clearly pointed out : and no corollary drawn that is not evidently deducible from the pending proposition. This severity of reasoning would be insensibly transferred to the mind of the reader, and would be attended with the most beneficial results, whether we consider its effects on the mind of the individual, or its tendency to raise the species in the scale of rationality.

Were studies of this kind more general, we would no longer be ashamed with the farrago of truths concealed by the obscurity of the

language, and the unwarranted assumption that we daily hear dignified with the name of argument. From the greater degree of skill with which our thoughts would be managed, we would be able to surmount the obstacles placed in the way of our forming correct opinions by the prejudices of education ; and instead of the chaos that debates as now managed generally present, we would find reasoning assuming all the regularity of system.

It may indeed be objected to this view of the subject, that but few readers would be induced to study works on science, when no immediate call of business or of pleasure compelled them to the task : and that the advantages resulting from it would appear too remote to counterbalance the apparent difficulties of the pursuit, and the seductions of lighter and more pleasing studies.

This difficulty may in a great measure be obviated by not purchasing any book at first, but such as do not detain us midst the abstractions of science ; but along with the first principles convey pleasing and popular views of whatever subject the authors may treat. Fortunately books of this kind are not wanting among us. As an example, I will merely instance the *Conversations on Chemistry*, written by a lady, a book that I am confident will do more to generate a taste for chemistry in the mind, than all the regular treatises on the subject in the English language. Books of this description, by the familiarity of the precepts and the elegance of the illustrations, will at once seduce the mind into more profound studies, and facilitate our progress by smoothing the declivity that awaits the adventurer on his first entrance into the regions of science.

But for the purpose of instilling a taste for those studies in the mind, I

would particularly recommend the perusal of periodical publications where discoveries and improvements in science, and the arts, are given as they occur to the public. The plaudits with which every new discovery is hailed, the discussions to which it gives rise, the contagion of illusory example, and the recency of the event, all conspire in creating a lively interest in the mind, and giving a permanency to the impression, which had it happened at a more remote period, or under less favourable circumstances, an occurrence of the kind would never have possessed.

But although I would most strenuously advise the admission of books on scientific subjects into every library, I would by no means have it supposed that I considered the *Belles Lettres* as of trifling importance. Very remote from me indeed is such a thought. Books of this description I consider as inexhaustible treasures of every kind of knowledge; as permanent sources of rational enjoyment. They are streams that at once fertilize and adorn. Treating more immediately of man and his concerns, they exhibit him to observation under a variety of aspects, and in every possible attitude, from the savage destitute of the comforts, to the pampered being of civilized society, possessed of all the luxuries of life. We gradually see him change his abode, from the gloomy cavern to the splendid palace. No longer the shivering tenant of the howling wilderness, but the proud inmate of the populous city. Astonished at the different views which men, in the extremes of society present, we almost hesitate to pronounce them beings of the same species; yet, in contemplating this difference, we are taught the important lesson, that great as those changes may

appear, they are simply owing to the gradual development and progressive improvement of the faculties that are common to all. Such books, by pointing out the varying clouds of prejudices and passions that obscured truth, and disgraced humanity in ages that are past, will prevent us from being involved in the same obscurity in those that are to come. And by storing the mind with the accumulated wisdom of ages, and condensing the experience of our ancestors, enable us to act nobly and virtuously in every trying emergency of human life.

They render acquainted classes in society, that would, were it not by their means, have remained totally ignorant of each other. By the minute and accurate pictures they afford of every rank, the sovereign can enter into the feelings and views of the humble cottager; and the lowest individual in his realm, study the character of the haughty and imperious monarch, and find a being subject to the same passions, actuated by the same motives, and only different from himself as his character is modified by the different situation in which he is placed.

To cultivated minds, books on the *Belles Lettres* are a source of real enjoyment. Their perusal affords one of the most refined and innocent pleasures of which our nature is susceptible. What delightful emotions do we experience, when transported by the poet into the regions of fancy, we witness fairer prospects, more blooming landscapes, and more luxuriant scenery, than nature, throughout the whole extent of creation, can afford. With what magic art does he at one moment warm us into joy, and the next, chill us into despondency; make the character he has drawn now inspire us with hatred,

and the next moment the object of our pity.

But it is from the union alone of science with polite literature, that the mind can extract from each their full proportion of good. An exclusive attachment to scientific and abstruse studies, has the effect of contracting the imagination, and deadening those finer feelings of the mind which can only be fully elaborated by the exercise derived from congenial pursuits. 'On the other hand, by devoting ourselves entirely to light reading, we hazard the production of a fastidious delicacy, an over-refinement of taste, which is oftener disgusted by the appearance of blemishes, than delighted by the discovery of beauties. Long accustomed to works of this description, others on less inviting topics appear totally insipid; and in every book we read, we look for the same pleasurable sensations and strong emotions we had heretofore experienced: but if disappointed in the expectation, it does not signify how important the subject may be, or how ably handled by the author; instead of being benefited by his instructions, we are only filled with disappointment, or inspired with disgust.

Science may be compared to the solid base, and the Belles Lettres to the ornamented capital. The one reminds us of a huge gothic castle of vast strength, but dark, frowning, and ungraceful; the other of a frost-work edifice, gaudy, fantastic, and unsubstantial. But when both unite in the same object, their effect is similar to a majestic Grecian temple, whose vastness of design is joined to delicacy of execution, massy strength to airy elegance, and on the whole, producing in the mind a mingled sensation of the beautiful and the sublime.

Having trespassed longer on your

time than I had at first intended, I shall conclude by observing that I design, should you countenance me in doing so, to trouble you in future with some occasional remarks on subjects of a similar nature.

S.I.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

GENTLEMEN,

THE fact is we have 25 yeomen raised in this parish, 10 of whom have been discarded; the place could well want the other 15. However, my design in writing the following petition from the hares of the parish of B—, is to show the uselessness of the yeomen in this place, and to expose the instigators in raising them: besides, I cannot say that I am any great friend to the game laws. I am, gentlemen, your very humble servant, F.

THE HUMBLE PETITION OF THE
HARES OF THE PARISH OF B—, TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE AND
HONOURABLE THE HOUSE OF COM-
MONS, PRAYING A REDRESS OF
GRIEVANCES.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN

WE, your humble supplicants, the hares of the parish of B—, impressed with a due sense of your humanity, goodness, and friendly disposition towards our body, return you our warm, grateful, and most unfeigned thanks for the lately enacted restrictions for our better protection; but we are sorry to state, that the many outrages committed of late in this parish against us, have forced us, contrary to our inclinations, to call on you for farther protection against such lawless depredations.

We lived happy and without